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ABSTRACT

A portfolio assessment process was implemented in the Special Education Division of Central Washington University's teacher education program. The portfolio assessment was designed as an "end of major" assessment with three goals: provide a continuous assessment of the program of studies, determine the quality of program graduates, and serve as a resource for school district personnel in recruitment and hiring. It is believed that effective assessment should include procedures which reflect the student's ability to demonstrate the critical teaching skills of assessment and program development, implementation, and evaluation. Students are introduced to the portfolio assessment process at an orientation meeting, and they meet with their academic advisors at least once each quarter to review the portfolio and receive help with difficulties. A checklist is provided to structure the communication process between the student and advisor concerning portfolio development. Minimum requirements for the portfolio include: research on the student's practicum population and eligibility criteria of all special education students; a comprehensive case study on one student; behavioral studies; an assessment process; an instructional plan; materials modification plan; individualized education program; transition plan; and parent-community involvement plan. Portfolio assessment recommendations are offered based on this university's experience. (Contains approximately 50 references.) (JDD)

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TEACHER CANDIDATE PERFORMANCE-BASED ASSESSMENT

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At the same time discussion is occurring regarding the restructuring of America's K-12 public school system to reflect an approach which is outcomes based as opposed to simply passing students through the curriculum, professionals who prepare, license, and certify educators are discussing the need to develop policies which are supportive of this restructuring. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium "are united in their view that the complex art of teaching requires performance-based standards and assessment strategies that are capable of capturing teachers' reasoned judgments and that evaluate what they can actually do in authentic teaching situations" (Model Standards for Beginning Teacher Licensing and Development: A Resource for State Dialogue, 1992).

PHILOSOPHY

A portfolio assessment process was implemented in Central Washington University's teacher education program with the Special Education Division implementing the new assessment process in the fall of 1992. The portfolio assessment process was designed as an effective "end of major" assessment with three main goals: (a) provide a continuous assessment of the program of studies, (b) determine the quality of program graduates, and (c) serve as a resource for school district personnel in the recruitment and hiring process.

Utilizing portfolios as an alternative assessment process is currently receiving a great deal of support from those within the field of education (Valeri-Gold, Olson & Deming, 1991). Portfolio assessment procedures can be found within classrooms from the preschool level through university settings as educators identify alternative assessment strategies which are compatible with outcomes based education. The perception held by many educators is that portfolios will help integrate teaching, assessment, and the curriculum into a more cohesive process (Gomez, Graue, & Bloch, 1991), reinforcing the philosophy that learning is an interactive process which involves the teacher and the student in a collaborative relationship.

Collaboration between teachers and students requires an assessment process that is both formative and summative in nature. Valeri-Gold, Olson & Deming (1991) view portfolios as a data collection process which enhances student performance, with active student participation throughout the process. Wolf (1991) believes portfolios enhance the perception that assessment is ongoing and that portfolios help to demonstrate student performance over time in natural situations. Portfolios have the luxury of being immediately responsive to feedback from professionals in the field, to research, to regulation changes, and have merit as a career-long assessment process.

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Portfolios are considered as alternative to traditional "end of program" standardized tests which tend to be summative in nature, containing little information that is beneficial regarding student outcomes as they relate to the curriculum. Standardized tests offer little in the way of student-teacher collaboration and fail to provide the opportunity for students to become active as well as reflective participants in the learning process.

The faculty of the Special Education Division at Central Washington University believe effective assessment includes procedures which reflect the student's ability to demonstrate those skills deemed critical for effective teaching: Assessment and program development, implementation, and evaluation. The outcome of the "end of major" assessment process will be evaluated according to three critical areas in the teaching process:

1. All special education teacher candidates should have mastery of course competencies established for effective teaching.

2. The competencies established are important and necessary for effective teaching.

3. All special education teacher candidates should be able to generalize information learned into any diverse situation.

An "end of major" assessment should be an accumulation of experiences and information that establish a student's unique strengths and abilities as they pertain to effective teaching. Performance is the key word when describing the last strand in this process. It is imperative that students demonstrate applied knowledge in a manner that integrates their personal style of learning and teaching with a fundamental knowledge base.

Specific goals of CWU's end of Special Education major assessment included the following:

1. Mastery of minimum competencies established by the faculty of the Special Education Division. The minimum competencies are flexible so they relate to information obtained from students, faculty, professional organizations, school district personnel, current research standards and findings, and societal expectations and needs.

2. Development of student portfolios which identify the uniqueness of the student's learning experience. Examples of specific strengths and abilities are compiled and kept by each student as a direct reflection of knowledge mastered, skills demonstrated, and abilities performed. The portfolios start at the beginning of each student's program within the Special Education Major. Students utilize the portfolios when they start their individual teaching experience.

3. Students demonstrate effective teaching practices and behaviors. Students, during their field-based special education practicum experience, demonstrate their mastery of effective teaching practices. The demonstrations of specific skills are jointly developed by the practicum student, supervising teacher, and University practicum supervisor. The individual demonstrations depend upon the practicum situation (e.g., age, area of disabilities, and number of students are some of the

factors), the practicum student's specific strengths and areas of interest, specific requirements of the practicum experience, and expectations of the supervising teacher.

BASIC REQUIREMENTS

Students need to attend the initial orientation meeting, which is held twice a quarter at different dates and times so that students will have an opportunity to attend. The meeting is designed to introduce students who are majoring in special education to the portfolio assessment process. The entire faculty within the Special Education Division attends the orientations and each faculty member presents a small piece of the whole process. Students are encouraged to ask questions during this time. Hopefully, they understand the benefits of the process, which will enhance their desire to become actively involved. The entire assessment process is covered in the meeting, including the philosophy and the summative part of the process. This initial meeting is attended by students in their initial quarter of work within the Special Education Major program.

All Special Education Majors meet with their academic advisors at least once each quarter to review the student's portfolio and help with any difficulties. The initial meeting each quarter is scheduled prior to class registration. The responsibility of the advisor is to facilitate the portfolio process with the student. At each advisement session the advisor discusses/checks the following with the student:

1. Purpose of portfolio

   A. What information is really important for the student to learn? How will the information benefit the student?

   B. What are the student's methods of showing what he/she has learned?

   C. How is the student linking assignments to instruction? How is the student linking assignments together?

   D. Does the student have a clear understanding of what is expected of him/her?

   E. How does the student feel about his/her progress?

2. Evidence options

   A. How has the student chosen to demonstrate knowledge of course competencies? How has the student chosen to demonstrate skills in effective teaching?

   B. What enhancement activities has the student chosen to include?

C. Does the student see his/her own growth based on the material included in the portfolio?

D. Which requirements are lacking evidence?

3. Assessment criteria

A. Is evaluation criteria for each assignment included in the portfolio?

B. Does the evidence included in the portfolio support the student's purpose of the portfolio?

C. Is there enough evidence? Too much evidence?

D. Has the student included a written reflection regarding what he/she has learned with individual strengths and weaknesses?

The checklist described above gives the faculty advisor some structure to help facilitate the communication process between the student and advisor. One of the advisor's responsibilities is to help the student develop a reflective process. The students should be constantly analyzing their strengths and areas for improvement.

MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS

Minimum requirements are established through class competencies and the "end of major" practicum field experience. The requirements include the following areas.

The student will research the practicum population with whom he/she is working and will identify eligibility criteria of all students in the practicum classroom. This requirement will help expose the special education major to the eligibility issues surrounding diverse student populations. This process should help allow the special education major to reflect upon eligibility issues and to help guide them when they are actively involved in the multi-disciplinary team process.

Each special education major will do a comprehensive case study on a student within the practicum field experience. The first part of the case study will include general background information about a particular student. This information should contain the student's name, date of birth, age, sex, grade level, parent's name(s), address and phone number, school currently attending, school address and phone number, teacher(s), and principal. These initial data should help students understand that they are dealing with people and that each student is unique.

The next part of the case study should deal with the reason why the student was referred. Again, one of the primary reasons for doing the case study is to help students realize that children are unique individuals with unique experiences. Information in this section may deal with who referred the child, why the referral was made, and pre-referral interventions that were tried.

The next part of the case study deals with relevant information that is particular to the individual student. This information should be particular to that child and could take many forms. The critical variable to look for here is the rationale the special education major uses for reinforcing that the information is truly relevant.

Observation information is the next section within the case study. Information in this section should pertain to observational information that has been used for educational decision making. Observational data will depend upon the individual child and the individuals doing the observations.

Another section deals with tests given and procedures used for qualifying the child for special education. Again, the information in this section will depend upon the individual child.

A related section deals with test results, which could be in such areas as general aptitude, level of achievement, reading performance, math performance, spelling performance, handwriting performance, oral language performance, written language performance, perception performance, psychomotor performance, self help skills, and/or social adaptation. Students must have the ability to analyze performance indicators to better understand the strengths and limitations of specific assessment tools. Analyzing and reflecting on test results helps aspiring teachers understand that test results should help paint a picture of a child's strengths and areas of concern, as long as they are interpreted within the limits of what they purport to measure.

Specific learning abilities and strategies already utilized with the child being analyzed should help the prospective teacher gain insight into remedial processes that were implemented and the possible impact they had with the child.

Classroom behavior is an area with direct implications on academic success for many students. Behavior is a very important area to analyze, especially for many students who are eligible for special education. Behavior can be a critical variable in a child's perception of themselves, their school, and their learning.

The summary and conclusion section of the case study will allow the student to reflect on the variety of information obtained, ask questions relevant to information obtained, and allow for a more complete understanding of not only the education process, but of the individual child. This "humanistic" approach to information gathering is designed to reinforce in our teacher candidates an understanding that individual people are involved in the educational process. All of the children we serve are unique with specific strengths and areas of need. This information should help create a philosophy among the teacher candidates which reflects the belief that children are the ultimate consumers within our educational system, and that we, as teachers, need to address their individualized needs as best we can.

There are seven additional areas which need to be fulfilled by the teacher candidates before graduation. They include behavioral studies, an assessment process, instructional plan, materials modification plan, individualized education program, transition plan, and parent-community involvement plan. Competencies within each of these areas can be met either during university classroom experiences or during their practicum field-based experience. Specific competencies within each area are evaluated and may become a part of the teacher candidate's portfolio.

The behavioral study is conducted using a student, or students, from the practicum classroom, or someone associated with the teacher candidate. The intervention period must be at least two weeks in duration. The written report of results must include the behavioral objective(s), the reinforcer(s), and/or punisher(s), behavioral principle used, raw data, graphs, and discussion. The discussion includes, but is not limited to, procedure, side effects, and individual thoughts on the process for further use. The teacher candidates have a choice as to which study to incorporate into their portfolio. The behavioral study should, however, reflect the teacher candidate's ability and understanding of behavioral principles.

The academic assessment process includes at least four different assessment techniques. The process includes the specific techniques, why they used the techniques described, how they utilized the techniques, and specific examples of the different techniques. The final product should be a comprehensive assessment process covering a part of the curriculum utilized in the practicum placement classroom. The goal of the assessment process is to allow teacher candidates to understand the relationship between teaching, the curriculum, and assessment. The process should reflect individual interests and abilities, along with a rationalization of the process utilized.

An instructional plan is developed which includes lessons in selected skill areas for acquisition, guided practice, fluency building, and generalization. Each lesson includes a rationale, assessment for planning the lesson, objectives, and evaluation measures. The instructional plan is designed for students to understand the importance of planning for instruction. Specific objectives which flow from a goal allow the teacher candidate to reflect on what is done well and what changes are needed to make the learning process more effective.

The materials modification plan includes commercially made materials and textbooks that are utilized in the regular classroom. These materials are modified and adapted for use with students in the practicum placement classroom. This experience is designed to help students understand the importance of adaptation in the learning process. Students will be able to understand that there is more than one way to reach a goal and that many materials can accomplish similar tasks, objectives or goals.

Each teacher candidate will write an individualized education plan for a student, utilizing the district I.E.P. forms. The goal of this competency is to familiarize the teacher candidate with the legal process, along with practical implications involved in the process. The focus is on the child's strengths and areas of need and should reflect information ascertained from the other areas involved in the minimum competencies.

A transitional services plan is developed for a student. The plan includes an organized and systematic set of activities which promote the successful movement of the student from a given instructional environment to another. A rationale for the activities must be given which addresses the student's unique individual needs as well as integrated services and community participation. This plan is designed to assist the teacher candidate in identifying those critical skills necessary for generalization to occur.

The parent/community involvement plan is created as a result of a needs assessment. The involvement plan includes a philosophy statement which addresses the importance of parents and

the community to the program and a goal statement which specifies the desired outcome. Activities which facilitate parent and community involvement are specified as well as evaluation systems. This process reinforces the belief that teaching and learning are an integral part of the community and that parents should play an active role in the learning process.

Enhancement possibilities during the practicum experience may include video tapes of specific teaching situations, conference presentations, attendance at inservice or workshops, specific lesson plans, or assistive technology plans. These enhancement possibilities reflect the unique experience within the practicum experience. Depending upon competencies obtained, areas of interest, areas lacking, or situational conditions, one or more of the enhancement possibilities is either chosen or required by the teacher.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made based upon the initial implementation of this new assessment process, reflecting the faculty of the Special Education Division at Central Washington University who are actively involved in the assessment process. Because the program is in its initial stage of implementation, follow-up information will be a critical part of the assessment process. The philosophy inherent in this assessment process centers around the fact that assessment should be flexible and based on information obtained from a variety of sources. The following recommendations flow from this philosophy.

1. Both formative and summative assessment procedures be utilized within a portfolio assessment process.

2. The portfolio assessment should reflect strengths one holds as compared to established competencies.

3. The portfolio process should be a collaborative process that allows for a free flow of information between the teacher candidate and the teacher trainer.

4. The portfolio process should include a reflective process where the teacher candidate can utilize self-analysis to improve skills.

5. The portfolio assessment philosophy includes learning as a life-long experience.

6. Learning and teaching are integral processes which can be successful only when actively incorporated together.

7. Portfolio assessment should be performance based.

8. Portfolio assessment should reflect on both the teacher and the student.

Portfolio assessment has some exciting possibilities for teacher trainers. Programs should utilize an alternative assessment process which reflects current trends and needs; then effective assessment processes are likely to be developed.

Current discussion focuses on the development of a performance-based teacher candidate assessment process involving "essential learning requirements" to be addressed by "performance indicators." Essentially, all teacher candidates would document (portfolio work samples, activities, course requirements, etc.) their individual competency level of each in meeting generic performance standards related to effective teaching as well as discipline specific standards (i.e., special education, bilingual). Performance-based is the key word in this process. Candidates must demonstrate applied knowledge in ways that integrate their personal style with a fundamental knowledge base. This process will be piloted in conjunction with an "integrated option" (special education/elementary education broad area major) Spring Quarter 1994.

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